

TESTIMONY for the SUBCOMMITTEE on HEALTH AND HOSPITALS

WHAT WE DO

I am grateful to have the opportunity to tell you about Inclusion Teaming, a portable after school program where young people can learn about the differences they see among themselves every day and gain skills for communicating beyond those differences.

Inclusion Teaming provides:

- Instruction for individuals for with social communication challenges alongside “typical peers”—those who have typical social communication patterns
- Software creation for immediate on-the-job support for the executive functioning challenges that accompany social communication challenges
- Job development teams for those whose challenges exceed available jobs or jobs where the supports made available are not sufficient

WHY INCLUSION TEAMING IS NEEDED

My name is Catherine Hogan, and for years I have worked with special needs children, as a school social worker, an assistant school administrator, a supervising clinician at the Yale Child Study Center, and an educational/anti-bullying advocate. Having worn all these hats, I gained experience seeing a school problem through multiple lenses. The most serious problem is the difficulty integrating our brightest youth with social communication challenges; not just including them in classrooms and activities but rather creating opportunities to communicate their ideas effectively with others. Many bright young people with social communication challenges do not have the skills to connect and require others understanding of their challenges to facilitate development of these skills. In the absence of opportunities to develop understanding of those with typical social communications the following problems occur for those with social communication challenges:

- Bullies target them for their differences both verbally and physically
- They become isolated
- They become loners – sitting alone at a lunch table day after day, after day
- Their talents may remain hidden or invisible
- Their progress becomes compromised and society is deprived of their abilities
- Social skills training, in school or in community, take place in an isolated settings
- Lunch bunch has not proved to be sufficient for communication skill development
- Treatment interventions in school and community, take place in isolated settings
- Some of these youth quit school, or for those that can afford it, they get home schooling
- The unemployment rate for these young people is exceedingly high

- Mental health issues become a concern, depending on the level and duration of their isolation
- Many seem to endure the pain of isolation until we become aware of its consequences when some form of loss of life occurs

HOW WE DO OUR WORK

In 2010, Inclusion Teaming opened its doors to become a here and now action plan. Inclusion Teaming facilitates skills in social communication through a community based service opportunity for young people with typical social communications and through a fee for service model for young people with social communication challenges. After a successful pilot program in Westport, we began in New Haven seeking ways to raise funds to make the program affordable to all families who had a child with a social communication challenge. We received a donation from a New Haven resident to run a program with Granville Academy at St. Raphael/Yale Campus. This program is running presently and will end in May 2013.

Inclusion Teaming brings young people with social communication challenges and their peers with typical communications together to:

- Appreciate each other's talents;
- Ensure improved preparation for the workplace, and
- Explore creative job possibilities.

With capacity funding, we can build groups at the middle school level, the high school level, the college level, and the post education level.

Inclusion Teaming utilizes an interview process as a safety net for children with untreated or developing mental health disorders. We are creating a team of psychiatrists who would either treat or provide backup consultation to those who would treat applicants referred by Inclusion Teaming, assessed to not be psychologically ready to participate with others in Inclusion Teaming.

Inclusion Teaming provides skills in social communication, and additionally, for those who have been bullied or isolated because of their differences, it offers an emotionally corrective experience. Ultimately, both groups, those with social communication challenges and those with typical social communications, develop a lifetime ability to communicate more effectively with each other in school, community, and workplace settings.

We believe that funding will help us expand our work, improve outcomes for young people with social communication challenges, and provide advanced skill levels for young people who have typical communications. Young people have traveled from around the state to attend our

current program with Granville Academy. We can bring our training to any community through a trainer of trainers model.

Today, you will hear from some of our participants tell you what Inclusion Teaming has done for them and how it can help all students. You will also read testimony about the value of our work from those who could not attend and sent emails to the appropriationtestimo@cga.ct.gov

Inclusion Teaming is working diligently to collaborate with experts and to incorporate the first hand experience of parents in order to improve the growing problem of bright youth who have limited knowledge or even no knowledge on how to communicate with each other.

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